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(54) **RESISTANCE WELDING POWER SUPPLY APPARATUS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A resistance welding power supply apparatus comprises a large-capacitance capacitor for storing resistance welding energy, a capacitor charging circuit, a switching element electrically connected between the capacitor and one electrode of a pair of welding electrodes, and a control unit for the switching element. If the welding current is less than a set current value at a point of time on the leading edge of a clock, then the control unit holds a control pulse for the switching element active or high from that point of time till the time when the welding current exceeds the set current value without being affected by the cycle of the clock. If the welding current exceeds the set current value at a point of time on the leading edge of the clock, then the control unit holds the control pulse inactive or low till a point of time on the leading edge of the next clock.

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(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **B23K 11/26**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **219/113; 219/110**

(58) **Field of Search** **219/113, 110**

(56) **References Cited**

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4 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets

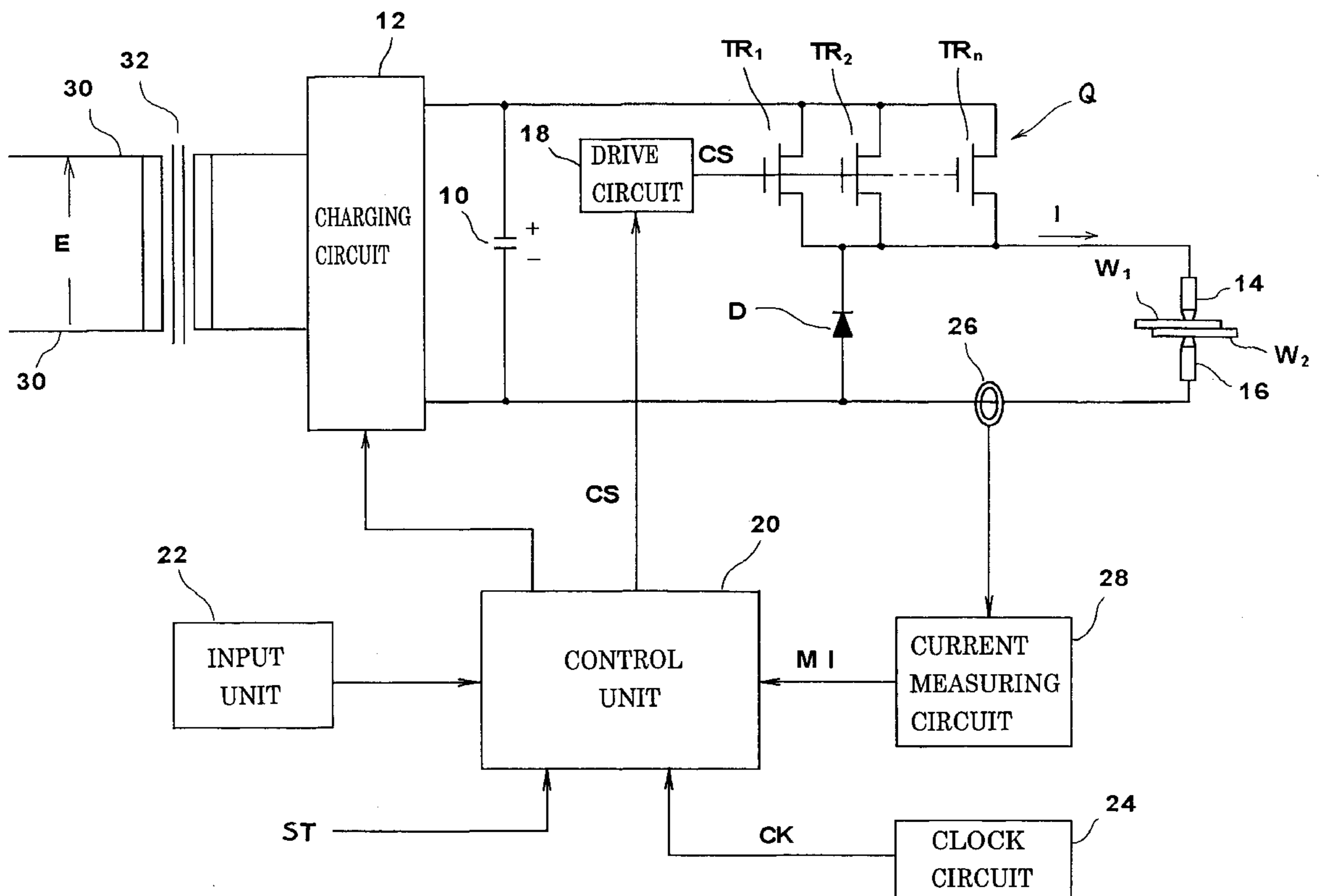


FIG. 1

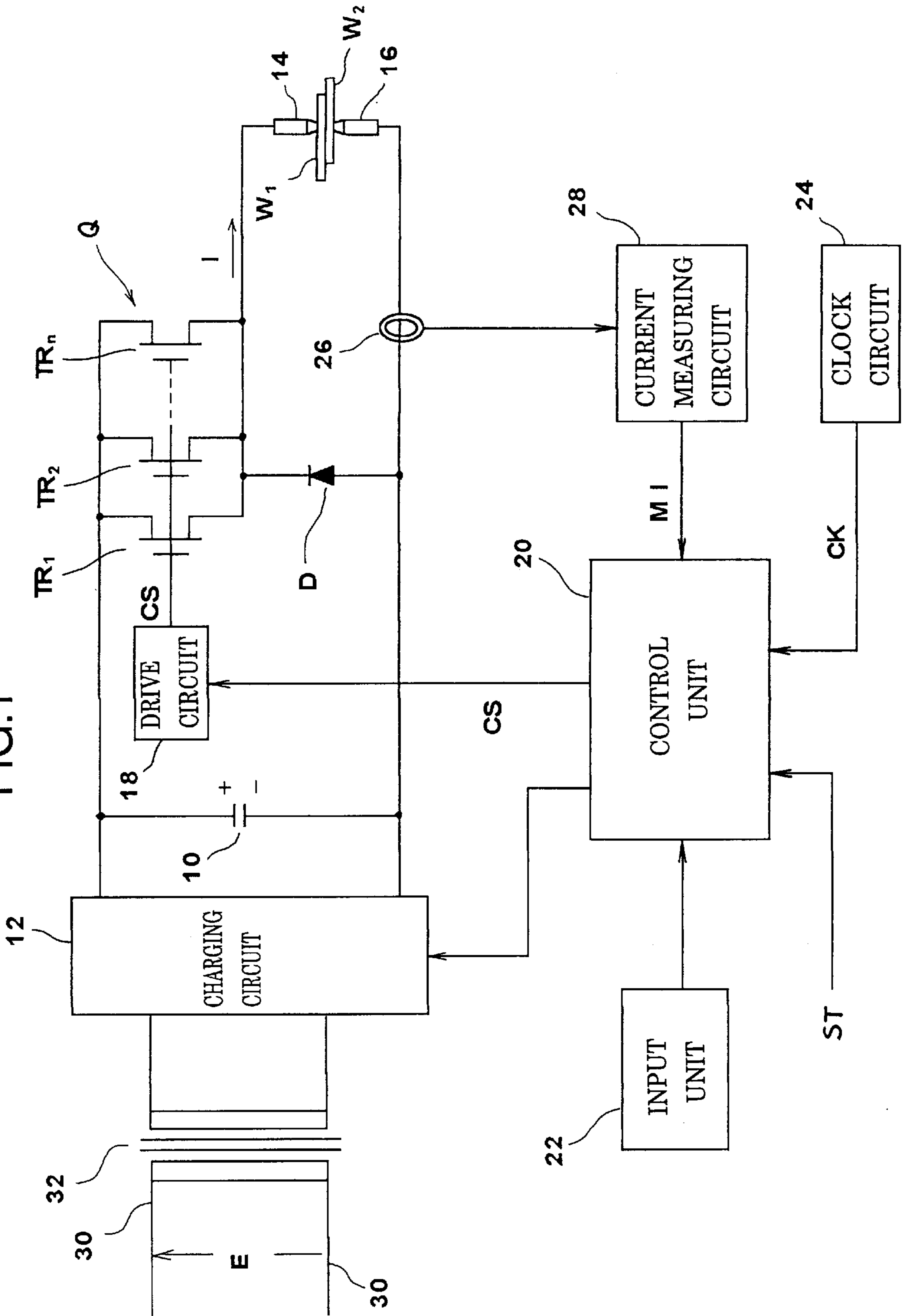


FIG.2

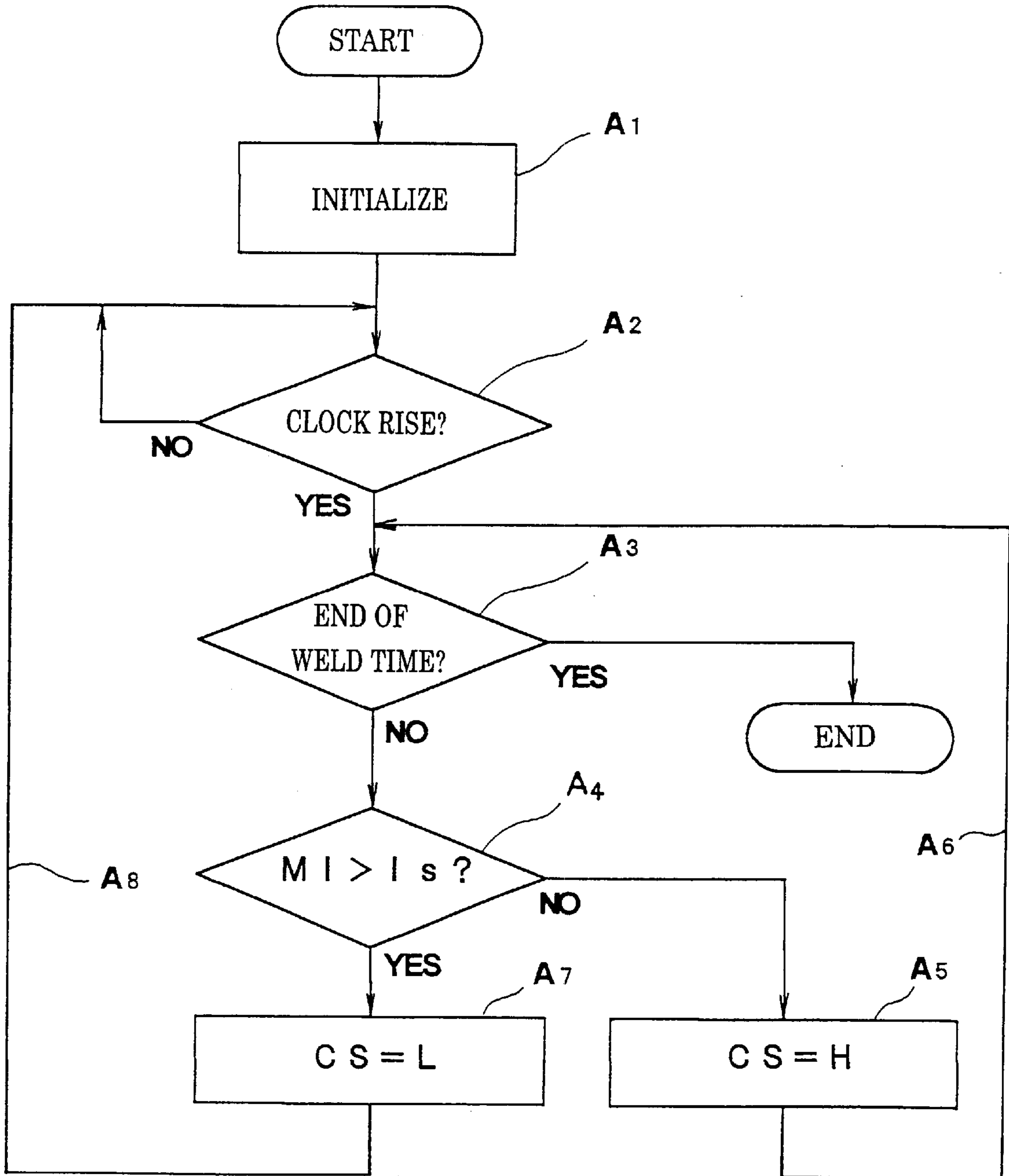
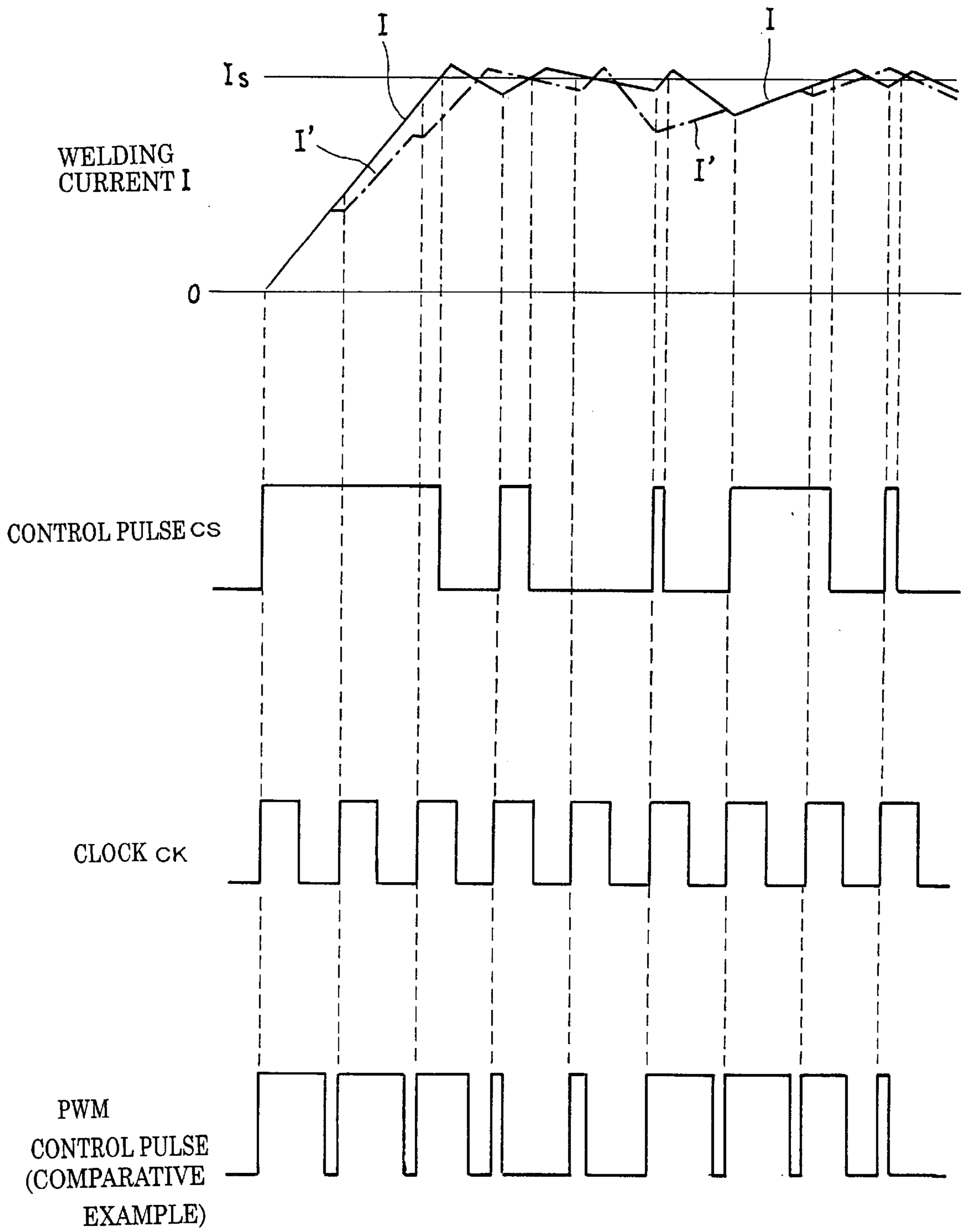


FIG.3



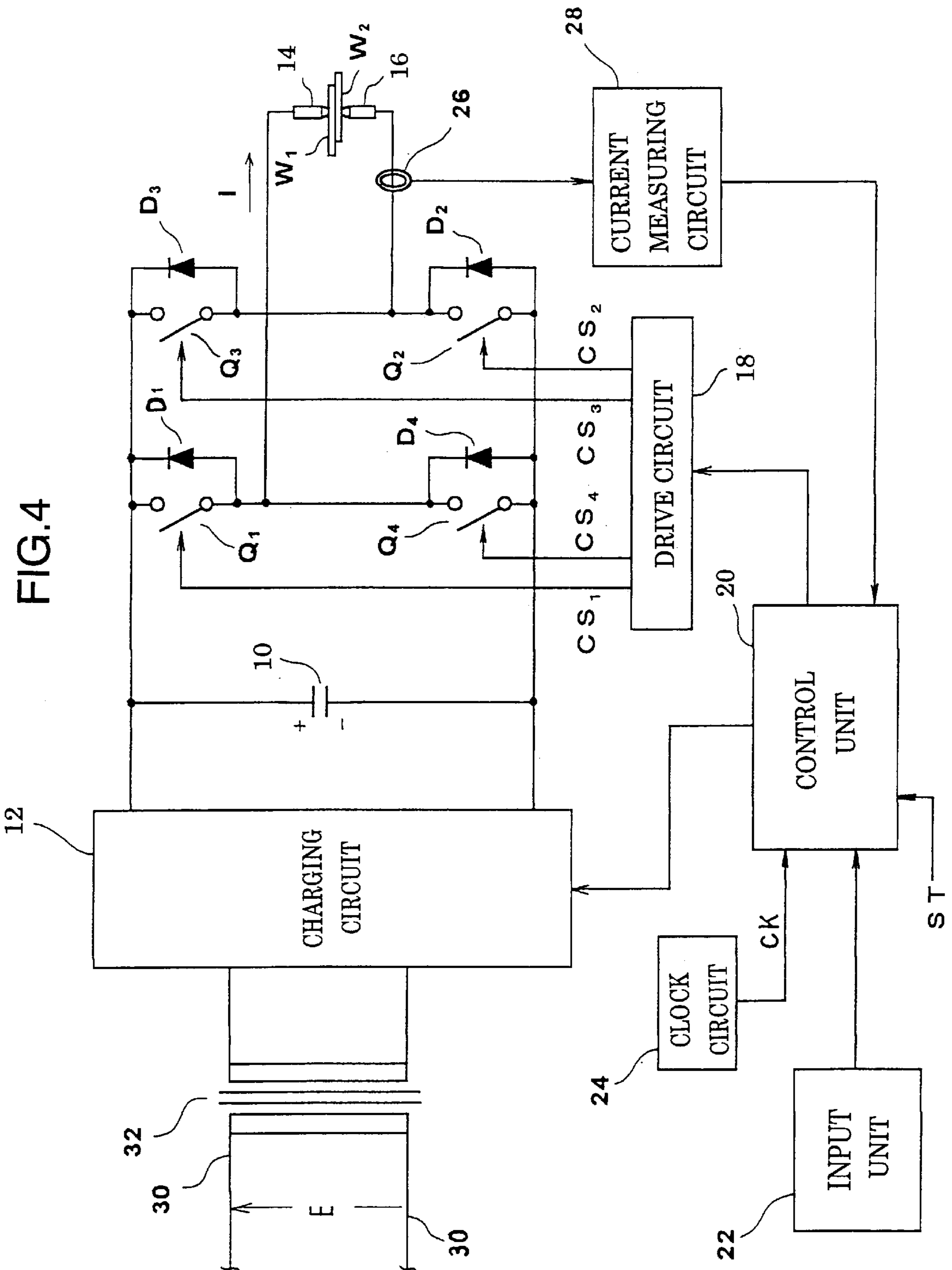
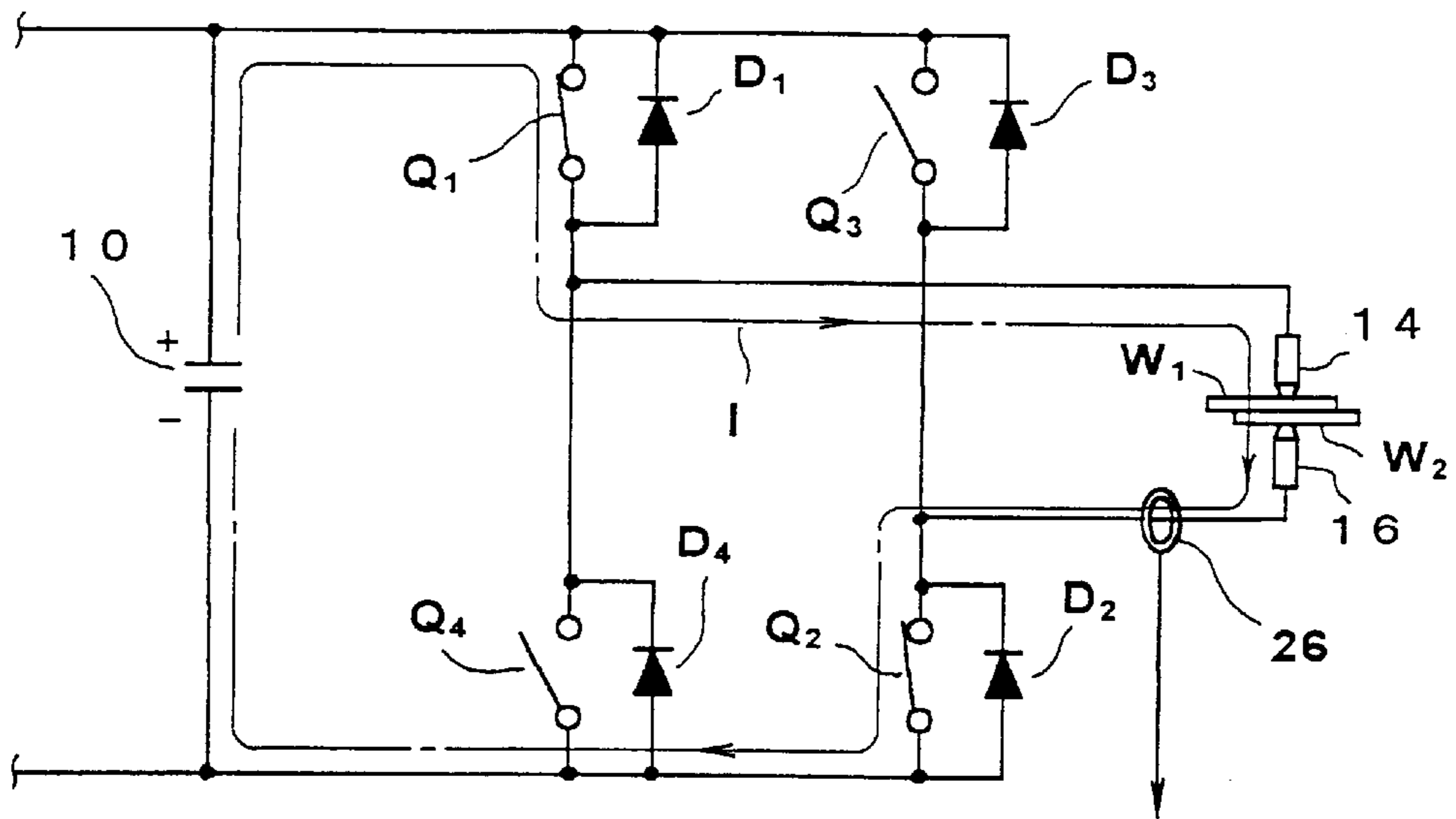
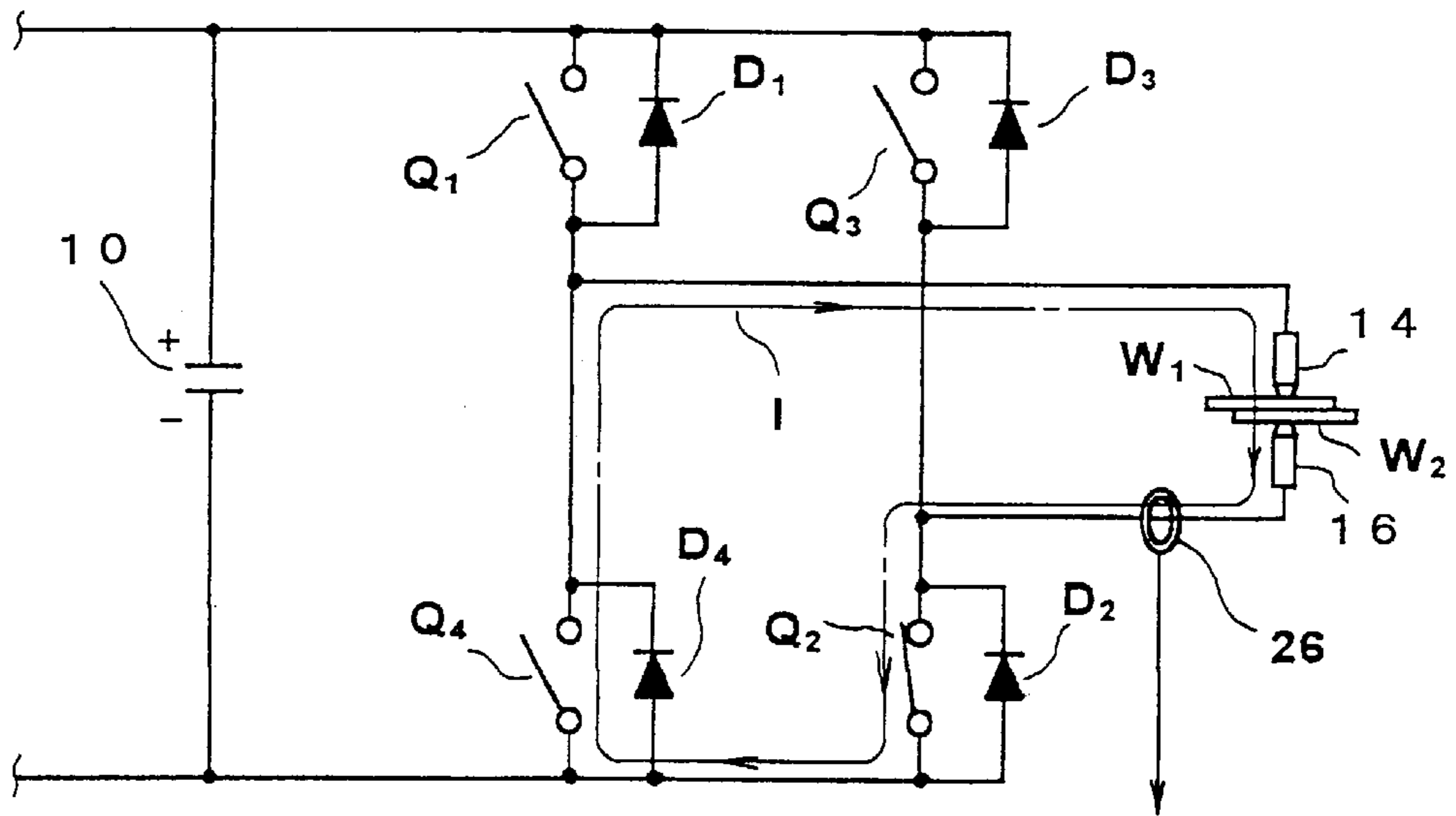


FIG.5



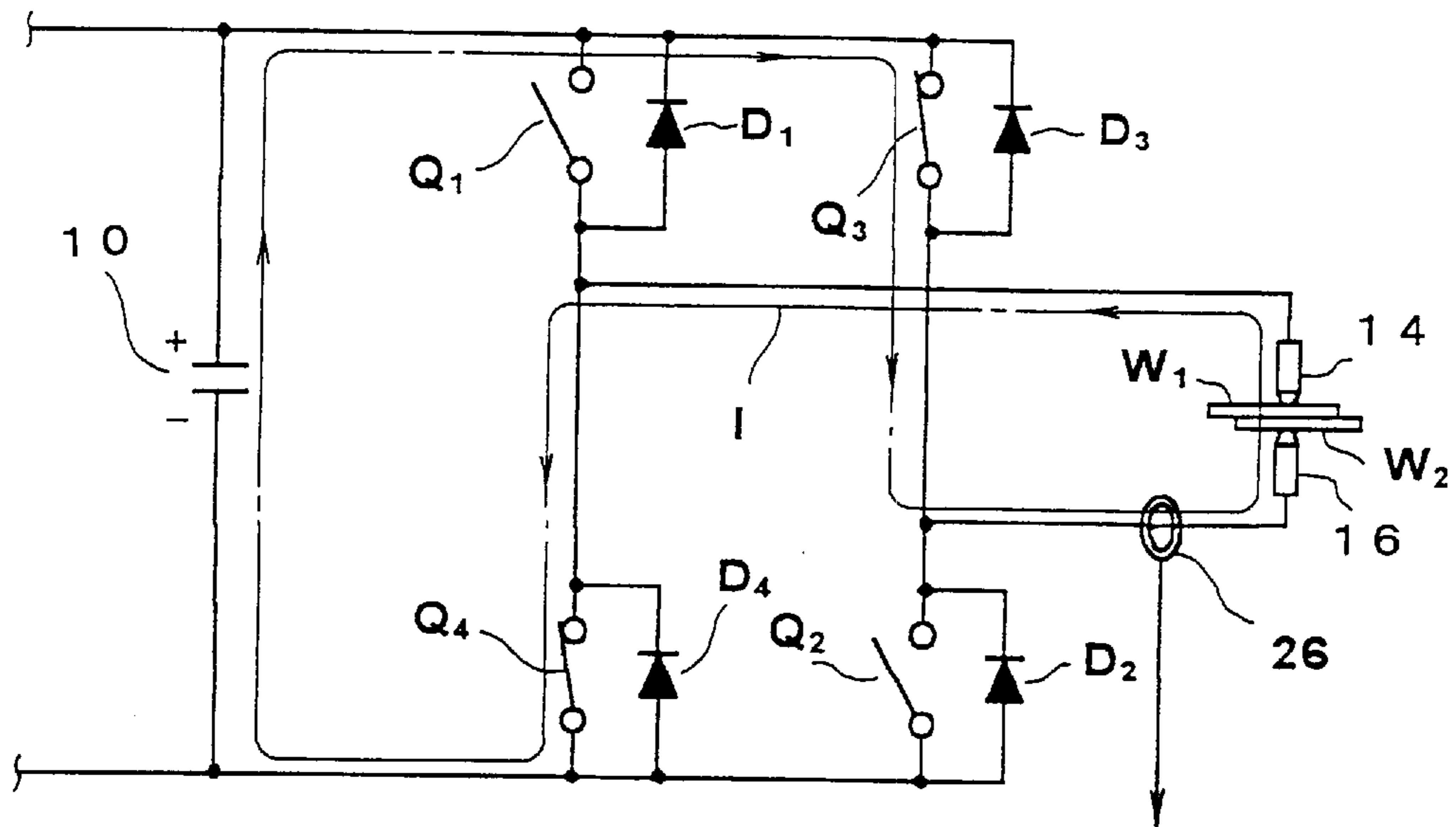
Q₁, Q₂ = ON
Q₃, Q₄ = OFF

FIG.6



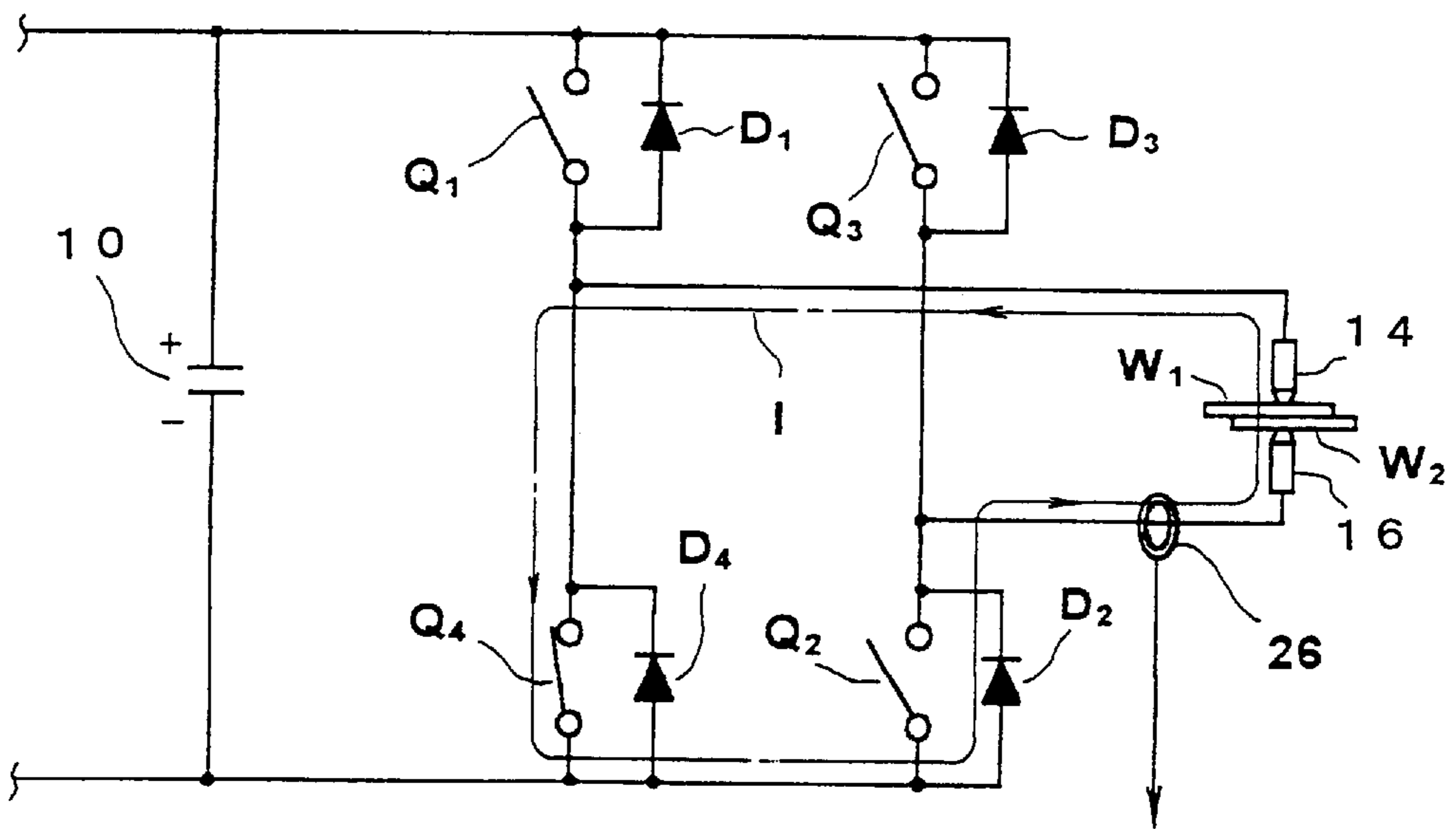
Q₁ = OFF, Q₂ = ON
Q₃, Q₄ = OFF

FIG.7



Q₁, Q₂ = OFF
Q₃, Q₄ = ON

FIG.8



Q₁, Q₂ = OFF
Q₃ = OFF, Q₄ = ON

RESISTANCE WELDING POWER SUPPLY APPARATUS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a power supply apparatus for resistance welding, and more particularly, to a power supply apparatus designed to supply a controlled welding current via a switching element to workpieces from a capacitor storing welding energy as electric energy therein.

2. Description of the Related Arts

Up until now, such a resistance welding power supply apparatus has employed switching transistors as the switching element to provide a switching control of the switching transistors by pulse-width modulation (PWM).

The PWM is a technique for variably controlling the pulse width of an active level (e.g., high level) within each cycle at every fixed switching cycle defined by a clock. The PWM is used to effect a constant-current control allowing the welding current to conform to a set current value so that a switching control can be provided for correcting a deviation of the welding current relative to the set current value for each switching cycle.

The above transistor-based resistance welding power supply apparatus has often been applied to precision spot welding whose workpieces are mainly precise small-sized metal members such as electronic components. In such precision spot welding, desired welding energy must properly be supplied to the workpieces within an extremely brief weld time (e.g., 10 ms or below), which needs a finer and more rapid constant-current control.

It was however difficult for the conventional transistor-based resistance welding power supply apparatus using PWM to rapidly and finely correct the deviation or error upon the rise of current or upon the unexpected current variation in the constant-current control due to the fact that the switching control is restrained by the condition $0 < T_w < T_c$ for each switching cycle where T_c is a cycle of the switching cycle and T_w is a pulse width of the control pulse fed to the switching transistors for each switching cycle.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention was conceived in view of the above problem involved in the prior art. It is therefore the object of the present invention to provide a resistance welding power supply apparatus capable of implementing a fine and rapid constant-current control and ensuring an improved resistance welding work quality.

In order to attain the above object, according to the aspect of the present invention there is provided a resistance welding power supply apparatus having a pair of welding electrodes through which a welding current flows, the pair of welding electrodes adapted to come into pressure contact with workpieces to effect a resistance welding on the workpieces, the power supply apparatus comprising a capacitor which stores electric energy for resistance welding in the form of electric charges; switching means for the supply of current electrically connected between the capacitor and one electrode of the pair of welding electrodes; and switching control means which, for the purpose of controlling the welding current during the supply of current for resistance welding, provide a control of the switching means such that, if the welding current is less than a set current value at a point of time of monitoring defined to occur at every predetermined time interval, then the switching con-

rol means keep the switching means in ON-state from the point of time of monitoring till the time when the welding current exceeds the set current value and that, if the welding current exceeds the set current value at the point of time of monitoring, then the switching control means keep the switching means in OFF-state till the next point of time of monitoring.

In the resistance welding power supply apparatus of the present invention, if the welding current is less than a set current value at a monitoring point defined at predetermined time intervals which is typically given by a clock, then the switching element is continuously kept in ON-state from that monitoring point till the time when the welding current exceeds the set current value without being affected by the clock cycle, whereas if the welding current exceeds the set current value at the monitoring point, then the switching element is continuously kept in OFF-state till the next monitoring point. Such a switching control allows the switching element to be turned on or off at an unfixed (non-cyclic) timing which is not restrained by the clock cycle to thereby correct (approximately to zero) the deviation or error of the welding current relative to the set current value in a minimum time and realize the rapid and fine constant-current control.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other objects, aspects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a circuit diagram showing a configuration of a resistance welding power supply apparatus in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a flowchart showing a procedure of a welding current control effected in the embodiment;

FIG. 3 illustrates waveforms of currents or signals which may appear at major parts of the embodiment;

FIG. 4 is a circuit diagram showing a configuration of a resistance welding power supply apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 illustrates a current-supplying circuit through which a welding current flows in one switching state in the power supply apparatus of the embodiment;

FIG. 6 illustrates a current-supplying circuit through which a welding current flows in one switching state in the power supply apparatus of the embodiment;

FIG. 7 illustrates a current-supplying circuit through which a welding current flows in one switching state in the power supply apparatus of the embodiment; and

FIG. 8 illustrates a current-supplying circuit through which a welding current flows in one switching state in the power supply apparatus of the embodiment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings which illustrate a preferred embodiment thereof in a non-limitative manner.

Referring first to FIG. 1 there is depicted a configuration of a resistance welding power supply apparatus in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention. The resistance welding power supply apparatus comprises a large-capacitance capacitor **10** for storing resistance welding energy in the form of electric charges, a charging circuit **12**

for charging the capacitor **10** to a predetermined voltage, a switching element **Q** electrically connected between the capacitor **10** and one electrode of a pair of welding electrodes **14** and **16**, and a control unit **20** which allows a switching operation of the switching element **Q** via a drive circuit **18** during the supply of welding current to provide a control of a welding current **I**. The welding electrodes **14** and **16** are coupled to a pressure mechanism not shown and come into pressure contact with workpieces (W_1 and W_2) during the welding work.

The switching element **Q** of this embodiment consists of a single or a plurality of switching transistors, e.g., FETs (field effect transistors) TR_1 to TR_n , which are connected in parallel. The switching element **Q** has a current input terminal connected to a positive electrode of the capacitor **10** and has a current output terminal connected to the welding electrode **14**. A freewheeling diode **D** is connected between the current output terminal of the switching element **Q** and a negative electrode of the capacitor **10**.

The control unit **20** is comprised of, e.g., a microprocessor (CPU) or a dedicated logic circuit and, in compliance with a predetermined program or procedure, provides controls of respective parts such as a welding current sequence control, a constant-current control and a capacitor charging control. The control unit **20** accepts various set values from an input unit **22** including e.g., a keyboard and accepts a clock signal **CK** of e.g., 250 kHz for switching control.

For measurement or feedback of the welding current **I** in the constant-current control, a toroidal coil **26** acting as a current sensor is fitted to a conductor extending between the freewheeling diode **D** and one of the welding electrodes **14** and **16** so that on the basis of an output signal of the current sensor **26**, a current measuring circuit **28** can feed a current measured value (instantaneous value) **MI** of the welding current **I** as an analog signal to the control unit **20** in real time. The control unit **20** generates a non-cyclic control pulse **CS** as will be described later on the basis of the current measured value from the current measuring circuit **28** so as to provide a switching (ON/OFF) control of the switching element **Q** via the drive circuit **18** by use of the control pulse **CS**. It is to be noted that the current measuring circuit **28** may give a digital current measured value **MI** to the control unit **20** at a higher clock rate than the clock signal **CK**.

Via a step-down transformer **32**, the charging circuit **12** receives a single-phase AC power supply voltage **E** of a commercial frequency from an AC power supply line **30**. The charging circuit **12** may be comprised of a single-phase rectifying circuit which serves to rectify a single-phase AC voltage from the transformer **32** into a DC voltage. A switching circuit for charging may be interposed between an output terminal of the rectifying circuit and the capacitor **10** to provide a finer and variable control of the charging voltage of the capacitor **10**. For the charging control there may further be provided voltage measuring means not shown which measure the charging voltage of the capacitor **10**.

FIG. 2 depicts a procedure of the welding current control provided by the control unit **20** of this embodiment, and FIG. 3 depicts signal or current waveforms which may appear at major parts of this embodiment. FIG. 3 further shows as a comparative example a waveform of a control pulse and a waveform of the welding current (**I**) in PWM control.

When the control unit **20** accepts a start signal **ST** from an external device not shown of a work transfer system for example, it activates a pressure mechanism to allow the welding electrodes **14** and **16** to come into pressure contact

with the workpieces (W_1 and W_2) by a predetermined pressing force and then executes supplying a welding current.

First, the control unit **20** initializes the respective parts of the welding current control system (step A_1) and sets various set values (weld time T_g , welding current value I_s , etc.) of the welding schedules into respective predetermined registers. At this point of time, the switching element **Q** is left in OFF-state.

Then, upon receipt of a clock **CK** (step A_2), the control unit **20** compares a measured value **MI** of the welding current **I** acquired from the current measuring circuit **28** with a current set value I_s in response to the leading edge of the clock **CK** (step A_4).

When the current measured value **MI** is smaller than the current set value I_s ($MI < I_s$) in this comparison, the control unit **20** sets the control pulse **CS** active, e.g., high (step A_5). When the control pulse **CS** goes high, the switching element **Q** turns on to allow a DC welding current **I** to flow through a path or circuit extending from the positive electrode of the capacitor **10**, the switching element **Q**, the welding electrode **14**, the workpieces (W_1 and W_2), the welding electrode **16** and the negative electrode of the capacitor **10**. The welding current **I** is based on discharge of the capacitor **10** and transiently increases with the elapse of time.

After setting the control pulse **CS** high as described above, the control unit **20** continues to monitor the welding current measured value **MI** from the current measuring circuit **28** without regard to the cycle of the clock **CK** (steps $A_6 \rightarrow A_3 \rightarrow A_4 \rightarrow A_5 \rightarrow A_6$) and, when the welding current measured value **MI** exceeds the current set value I_s , returns the control pulse **CS** to low (steps $A_4 \rightarrow A_7$). Therefore, immediately after the start of the current supplying, the welding current **I** rises substantially linearly until the welding current **I** exceeds the set current value I_s as depicted in FIG. 3. During this current rise, the control pulse **CS** remains high without being affected (interrupted) by the cycle of the clock **CK**. After return of the control pulse **CS** to low after completion of the rise of the welding current **I**, the control unit **20** waits for the rise of a subsequently incoming clock **CK** (steps $A_8 \rightarrow A_2$).

When the control pulse **CS** goes low, the switching element **Q** is turned off to bring the discharge of the capacitor **10** to a termination. Then, the welding current **I** continues to flow through a circuit starting from the welding electrode **14** and passing through the workpieces (W_1 and W_2), the welding electrode **16** and the freewheeling diode **D** and returning to the welding electrode **14**. It is to be understood that the welding current **I** flowing through the circuit is a freewheeling current generated by the inductance of the load circuit and hence decreases with the elapse of time.

Upon receipt of the next clock **CK** with the control pulse **CS** being low, the control unit **20** compares the welding current **I** with the set current value I_s at the timing of the leading edge of that clock **CK** (step A_4).

Provided that the current measured value **MI** exceeds the current set value I_s in this comparison ($MI > I_s$), the control unit **20** keeps the control pulse **CS** low (step A_7) and waits intactly for receipt of the next clock pulse **CK** (steps $A_8 \rightarrow A_2$). Thus, the welding current **I** continues to decrease substantially monotonically during at least that clock cycle.

On the contrary, if the current measured value **MI** is less than the current set value I_s ($MI < I_s$), then the control pulse **CS** is set high in the same manner as the above (step A_5). This allows the switching element **Q** to turn on at the timing

of the leading edge of the clock CK in that clock cycle, with the result that the welding current I increases in turn. The control unit 20 continues to increase the welding current I while keeping the control pulse CS high (thereby leaving the switching element Q in ON-state) without regard to the cycle of the clock CK (steps $A_6 \rightarrow A_3 \rightarrow A_4 \rightarrow A_5 \rightarrow A_6$). At the time when the welding current I exceeds the set current value I_s , the control unit 20 returns the control pulse CS to low to turn off the switching element Q (steps $A_4 \rightarrow A_7$). The control unit 20 then waits for receipt of the next clock CK (steps $A_8 \rightarrow A_2$).

In the constant-current control of this embodiment, in this manner, if the welding current I is less than the set current value I_s at a point of time on the leading edge of the clock CK, then the control pulse CS for the switching element Q is held active or high, without being influenced by the cycle of the clock CK, from that point of time till the time when the welding current I exceeds the set current value I_s , whereas if the welding current I exceeds the set current value I_s at the leading edge of the clock CK, then the control pulse CS is held inactive or low till the leading edge of the next clock CK.

As seen in FIG. 3, the control pulse CS of this embodiment is generated by such a switching control as described above and therefore rises or falls at unfixed timing free from restriction of the cycle of the clock CK. However, by virtue of such a non-cyclic control pulse CS, it is possible to accurately cope with deviations or errors of the welding current I relative to the set current value I_s , thereby achieving more rapid and finer constant-current control than PWM. In particular, where a large deviation is present e.g., immediately after the start of the current supplying or due to the sharp impedance variations of the workpieces (W_1 and W_2), the deviation can be corrected to substantially null linearly or in the minimum time, whereupon it is possible to provide a stable and secure constant-current control even during the brief weld time in the precision spot welding, etc., and thus to ensure a good finish of weldment.

Reference is then made to FIG. 4 which illustrates a configuration of a resistance welding power supply apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. In the diagram, same reference numerals are given to parts having substantially the same features or functions as the constituent elements of the power supply apparatus of the first embodiment (FIG. 1) described above.

In the resistance welding power supply apparatus of this embodiment, four switching elements Q_1 , Q_2 , Q_3 and Q_4 are connected as seen in FIG. 4 between the capacitor 10 and one of the welding electrodes 14 and 16. During the supply of welding current, the switching elements Q_1 to Q_4 are selectively switching operated to provide a control of the welding current I in a polarity-switchable fashion. The switching elements Q_1 to Q_4 may each be comprised of a single or a plurality of switching transistors, e.g., FETs (TR_1 to TR_n) which are connected in parallel.

The first switching element Q_1 has one terminal electrically connected to the welding electrode 14 and has the other terminal electrically connected to the positive terminal of the capacitor 10. The second switching element Q_2 has one terminal electrically connected to the welding electrode 16 and has the other terminal electrically connected to the negative terminal of the capacitor 10. The third switching element Q_3 has one terminal electrically connected to the welding electrode 16 and has the other terminal electrically connected to the positive terminal of the capacitor 10. The fourth switching element Q_4 has one terminal electrically

connected to the welding electrode 14 and has the other terminal electrically connected to the negative terminal of the capacitor 10. In parallel with the switching elements Q_1 , Q_2 , Q_3 and Q_4 are connected diodes D_1 , D_2 , D_3 and D_4 , respectively, to be in an opposite polarities of current to corresponding ones of the switching elements.

The first to fourth switching elements Q_1 , Q_2 , Q_3 and Q_4 are independently switching (ON/OFF) controlled by first to fourth control pulses CS_1 , CS_2 , CS_3 and CS_4 , respectively, which are given via the drive circuit 18 from the control unit 20.

In a positive current-supplying mode where the welding current I flows through the workpieces (W_1 and W_2) in a positive direction, the control unit 20 provides an ON/OFF control of the first and second switching elements Q_1 and Q_2 at a predetermined timing while keeping the third and fourth switching elements Q_3 and Q_4 in OFF-state.

For example, as seen in FIGS. 5 and 6, for the duration of the positive current-supplying mode, the first switching element Q_1 may be ON/OFF controlled while keeping the third and fourth switching elements Q_3 and Q_4 in OFF-state but the second switching element Q_2 in ON-state. In such a case, the control unit 20 may generate a control pulse CP_1 for the first switching element Q_1 in the same control procedure as the above embodiment (FIG. 2).

In a negative current-supplying mode where the welding current I flows through the workpieces (W_1 and W_2) in a negative direction, the third and fourth switching elements Q_3 and Q_4 are ON/OFF controlled at a predetermined timing while keeping the first and second switching elements Q_1 and Q_2 in OFF-state.

For example, as seen in FIGS. 7 and 8, for the duration of the negative current-supplying mode, the third switching element Q_3 may be ON/OFF controlled while keeping the first and second switching elements Q_1 and Q_2 in OFF-state but the fourth switching element Q_4 in ON-state. In this case as well, the control unit 20 may generate a control pulse CP_3 for the third switching element Q_3 in the same control procedure as the above embodiment (FIG. 2).

The power supply apparatus of this embodiment is conveniently applied to e.g., two-point simultaneous joining resistance welding (series welding) and makes feasible a high-speed, fine, stable and secure constant-current control with ensured good finish of weldment. Furthermore, effective switching can impart elongated service lives to the elements.

According to the resistance welding power supply apparatus of the present invention, as set forth hereinabove, it is possible to implement a fine and high-speed constant-current control and to improve the work quality of the resistance welding.

While illustrative and presently preferred embodiments of the present invention have been described in detail herein, it is to be understood that the inventive concepts may be otherwise variously embodied and employed and that the appended claims are intended to be construed to include such variations except insofar as limited by the prior art.

What is claimed is:

1. A resistance welding power supply apparatus having a pair of welding electrodes through which a welding current flows, said pair of welding electrodes adapted to come into pressure contact with workpieces to effect a resistance welding on said workpieces, said power supply apparatus comprising:

a capacitor which stores electric energy for resistance welding in the form of electric charges;

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switching means for the supply of current electrically connected between said capacitor and one electrode of said pair of welding electrodes; and

switching control means which, for the purpose of controlling said welding current during the supply of current for resistance welding, provide a control of said switching means such that, if said welding current is less than a set current value at a point of time of monitoring defined to occur at every predetermined time interval, then said switching control means keep said switching means in ON-state from said point of time of monitoring till the time when said welding current exceeds said set current value and that, if said welding current exceeds said set current value at said point of time of monitoring, then said switching control

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means keep said switching means in OFF-state till the next point of time of monitoring.

2. The resistance welding power supply apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said switching control means include current measuring means arranged to measure an instantaneous value of said welding current.

3. The resistance welding power supply apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said switching control means include a clock circuit which generates a clock signal giving said point of time of monitoring.

4. The resistance welding power supply apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said switching control means include a clock circuit which generates a clock signal giving said point of time of monitoring.

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